

NSA: Fat cats of student power

Manhattan, Kans.

He is white, militant and brazenly middle class. He is not averse to sit-ins and to university disruptions. He's the man from student government, and his specialty is student power.

At the annual convention of the National Student Association (NSA) held here at Kansas State University last week, student delegates from around the country buttonholed each other like big-time politicians, chastised each other like all good liberals and charted an uncertain course of radical educational reform that could prove surprisingly productive in the next several years.

From experimental colleges to the abolition of grades, NSA delegates plotted strategies for real student participation in the educational process that has already liberalized some institutions and will likely contribute to the facelifting of universities throughout the nation in the not-too-distant future.

Seated by states in a giant convention hall, the nation's student leaders harangued the men of the Establishment whose positions they will eventually fill. The vast majority of them oppose the continuation of the war in Vietnam and supported the candidacy of Eugene McCarthy.

Middle-class revolt

Schooled in the pragmatic, the students received from NSA the tools to deal with an intransigent conservative university structure. They are part of and a product of the middle-class revolt in alliance with corporate liberals who are demanding participation in the political processes and wholesale reforms of the system.

With its headquarters in Washington, D.C., NSA is an amalgamation of student governments with a national budget next year which may exceed \$1 million, largely collected from the federal government and foundations as well as from a number of major corporations.

In February, 1967, NSA was exposed as a major conduit of the Central Intelligence Agency, serving as a cover for U.S. spy operations abroad and as an alternative to leftist activity by students at home. Today, NSA officials note with a smirk that the exposure "put us on the map" and resulted in the association picking up more than 50 new members.

Radicals absent

The scandal had its drawbacks, however, since most radicals pointedly bypassed the convention this year, causing some dismay among moderates who enjoyed locking horns with their leftist peers. Others complained at the lack of militancy of this year's crop of black delegates. "These guys are just a bunch of middle-class Negroes," snorted an NSA officer, a white middle-class student from New York.

While black and white politicians good-naturedly went at each other's throats, the great throbbing mass of NSA delegates responded enthusiastically to the slogan of the convention, "Do It!" a catchall phrase that included everything from denouncing yourself, your delegation and the convention as white racist to indulging in highly structured psychotherapy "games" in which the purpose is to make your fellow students "break." These games were described as "beautiful." In one such game, called "Totalitarian Teacher," a self-proclaimed "strong personality" hired by NSA acted as the instructor, methodically taking each student to task, placing them one by one up against the wall (if one may borrow an expression) until the student cracked. One girl said she almost lost her mind under the verbal darts of the teacher.

"Isn't this a bit insane?" a reporter whispered to one of the participants.

"Oh, no. She's being selfish."

"Selfish?"

"Yes, she's supposed to crack. I know her. She's a very selfish girl."

"I see . . . she's being selfish."

"Yes."

The playfulness of the bourgeoisie was containable. One evening nearly 100 utterly straight students painted themselves with every color imaginable and danced to the recordings of Dylan and a light show in the great outdoors. On another evening, in the course of an indoor rock concert, a girl who had been involved in an intensive four-day NSA "drug game" went berserk, heaving everything she could get her hands on.

By Randy Furst

Corporate co-optation

Other aspects of the congress were more sedate and predictable, such as the criminal co-optation. Several adventurous corporations have seized control of the service wing of NSA and have converted it into rampant profiteering. NSA has contracted a booking agency to sell student governments such notables as Country Joe and the Fish, and Ferante and Teicher at reduced rates, while NSA gets its cut of the profits. Through NSA, a Baltimore firm sells life insurance to the students of NSA's member schools and to parents who are preoccupied with their children's imminent deaths. NSA has also bought into a travel bureau, a national record club, and seemed well on the way to contracting a newly incorporated firm to distribute employment questionnaires to seniors interested in corporation careers. If adopted, the plan would give business a quicker crack at the student employment market, meanwhile avoiding those inconvenient university placement bureaus that have become somewhat overcrowded with demonstrators of late.

Ford's bread

Meanwhile, the Ford Foundation is underwriting an educational reform project called "Edin" with a grant of \$315,000. The once militant black commission, which this year was renamed the Third World Commission, is also sponsored by Ford.

Blacks who walked out of the convention demanded that NSA get more money for their commission. For two days, the delegates fought a trivial credentials battle in which the University of Alabama's all-white delegation was challenged as racist by an Alabama black student, thereby unlocking the door to challenges of other white delegations.

If the delegates had followed the logic of a resolution passed last year, calling for black power "by any means necessary," then they would have voted NSA out of existence.

Meanwhile, several foreign students representing the socialist struggles in France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, England, Italy and Mexico floated through the convention, delivering speeches and joining workshops. Students from the U.S. understood the ideological questions raised, but seemed to perceive dimly the foreign struggles as part of the international student movement. Student, student, student: that's all one heard. It was as though they were a race of their own.

THERE'S A LOT OF JOBS BEING LOST TO AUTOMATION
THESE DAYS...



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